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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 001020

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TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: POST-MORTEM OF A DELTA KIDNAPPING: SHELL AND
BAYELSA STATE WEIGH IN

REF: A. LAGOS 956
[1](#)B. LAGOS 943

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (D & E)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) This cable recounts Mission conversations with key Shell and Bayelsa State interlocutors regarding the July 6-10 kidnapping of Dutch national and Shell contractor Michael Llos (reftels A and B). Shell and Bayelsa State officials concurred the original kidnappers appeared to be a poorly organized team, who demonstrated neither the discipline nor operational skills of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) or Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC). Bayelsa State Secretary of Government, Dr. Igali, told us the group holding Llos was a breakaway element from FNDIC that wanted to use this incident to establish their independent credentials. A Shell security official agreed MEND/FNDIC members were likely involved in the kidnapping, albeit without authorization from their leaders. The latest kidnapping appears to have placed a strain on the coalition of Shell and Bayelsa State officials working to free the hostage.

Debrief Points to Poor Organization
and Discipline among Militants

[1](#)2. (C) After de-briefing Llos about his kidnapping, Shell Security Manager Main gave us a summary of the chain of events during Llos' ordeal, and his impression of the group which held him. Llos was kidnapped at about 9 a.m. on July 6 from a Shell gas gathering plant. The kidnappers did not have enough fuel for their get-away boat. They attacked another boat to steal fuel, shooting and killing a local guard in the process. At about 6 p.m., they landed at a small village, removing the military and mobile police

(mopol) uniforms they wore to apprehend Llos. They re-boarded the vessel, and took Llos to an even smaller village with 5-6 huts. He remained there for the duration of his detention, guarded by 12 to 16 men at one time, from a rotating crew of 25 to 30 men. Llos reported the group seemed well-accepted in the villages they visited. Shell believes the militants held Llos on the Bayelsa side of the Delta-Bayelsa state border.

13. (C) Llos told Shell the kidnappers were ragtag, maintained poor order, and relied on borrowed weapons. In what can only be called a unique partnership, local communities apparently loaned weapons for the operation in exchange for a split of the ransom money. The kidnappers seemed to lack the operational security MEND/FNDIC displayed during the January and February expatriate kidnappings; for example, the kidnappers failed to block their cell phone numbers, and continued to allow Llos access to his cell phone to call family and colleagues. A man named Orlando appeared to be the group's leader, but disappeared from the scene after July 8. In the evenings, the men in the group consumed large quantities of drugs, including what they called cocaine, had fist fights amongst themselves, and frequently fired off their weapons. Llos said they were also selling drugs.

Ransom, not Political Goals were the Aim

14. (C) Shell reported the group kidnapped Llos for ransom money, not political ends. The militants complained to Llos about the desperate development situation in the Delta, but did not subject him to protracted political lectures on Delta issues as MEND/FNDIC did previous hostages. The militants did not voice allegiance to any militia group. Shell officials noted the group seemed quite desperate to "unload"

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Llos, quickly reducing the ransom demand from 200 million Naira (about \$15 million USD) on July 6, to 20 million Naira by July 8. Shell reports Bayelsa State paid ransom for Llos, as it has done in some of the past hostage incidents.

Kidnappers Likely Were FNDIC Freelancers

15. (C) Dr. Igali, a key figure in resolving the January and February hostage situations, was again at the center of these negotiations. Igali concurred with Shell's assessment regarding the disorganization of this band of kidnappers. He thought neither MEND nor Dokubo Asari's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) were directly involved. Igali told us the group holding Llos was a breakaway element from FNDIC that wanted to use this incident to establish their independent credentials. Igali even indicated he mobilized FNDIC leader Tom Polo to prevent the perpetrators from gaining publicity and traction.

16. (C) Shell Security Manager Colgate assessed FNDIC/MEND members were likely involved in the kidnapping, albeit without authorization from their leaders. During a phone call Llos made to his colleagues during captivity, a militant threatened to take Llos to the Bakassi Peninsula, echoing phrasing militants used during the January/February hostage crisis. While dismissing the threat as spurious, Colgate assessed the threat as evidence that some of those holding Llos were involved in earlier kidnappings.

Shell And Bayelsa State Did Not See Eye To Eye

17. (C) Every hostage situation causes tension, even between parties working to procure the hostages' release. This round

was even more so, with Shell voicing rancor towards Bayelsa State officials. Shell's Colgate complained about Igali,s involvement in the hostage negotiations, particularly when it then appeared that Llos had been moved out of Bayelsa into Delta State. Colgate claimed a potential release for July 7 was aborted at the last minute, and blamed Igali for throwing a spanner into negotiations. (Comment: While Colgate,s remarks are disconcerting, we should not make too much of them. Igali was helpful during previous hostage incidents, and there is no reason for him to take a negative role at this point. End comment.) Colgate complained Delta State, meanwhile, had been completely inactive.

Comment

18. (C) The latest kidnapping highlights a number of worrying trends. A series of "militant for hire" kidnappings have occurred in recent weeks as disgruntled communities team with avaricious militants to make money. Although tense, these community-based jobs have been fairly quickly resolved. However, Llos, kidnapping seems like a hybrid, in which a breakaway militant group took greater control once the kidnapping had been accomplished. Kidnapping expatriates in the Niger Delta has become a more lucrative business than in the past. While Dr. Igali was able to secure Llos,s release after five days, the emergence of maverick elements within FNDIC may be a signal that its leader Tom Polo can no longer maintain discipline, and may be an early indication of a possible leadership tussle over the horizon. We are likely to see more freelance kidnappings in the future.

19. (C) The kidnappings place strain on the relationship between Shell and government officials. We believe Dr. Igali wanted to free Llos quickly, but also wanted to prevent the birth of another militant faction. Shell, on the other hand, wanted the situation resolved as quickly as possible, and was not smitten by these other considerations which bothered Igali. The working relationship between Colgate and Igali,

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while often fractious, has been key to solving previous hostage situation, and seems to have taken a serious knock this time. Antipathy between the oil company and the state officials would significantly weaken negotiations and make obtaining the release of future hostages more difficult. Thus, while incidents are increasingly frequent, the current mechanism for resolving this growing phenomenon are perhaps being put to the test because of competing priorities between Shell (and by extension other oil companies) and Nigerian government officials.

BROWNE